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**Contact: Wendy Fox
617-626-1453**

FORESTRY PRACTICES PRAISED IN ANNUAL AUDIT

Report cites “significant advances” over the last four years

Forestry practices of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and the Department of Fish and Game’s Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW) received high marks in a 2008 audit, allowing the agencies’ original five-year certification by the Forest Stewardship Council to continue. In April 2009, an assessment to determine whether a second five-year certification will be awarded is scheduled to begin.

Prepared by Scientific Certification Systems of California, the 2008 surveillance audit of agencies under the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs with forest management responsibilities cited progress in marking hundreds of miles of property boundaries, completing forest road and trail inventories, and controlling ATV damage on state lands.

DCR earned praise for developing Forest Resource Management Plans to ensure consistent standards for forestry. The audit also observed that DFW “has done a remarkable job of achieving goals with the assistance of excellent contractors.”

“We are delighted and quite proud of the high marks bestowed on this agency by the auditors,” said DCR Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan Jr. “DCR oversees 285,000 acres of forest land across the Commonwealth, and while there is still room for improvement, we believe our forestry practices are among the best in the nation.”

“DFW strives to manage its forests and other habitats to enhance and maintain biological diversity on more than 150,000 acres of Wildlife Management Areas,” said Department of Fish and Game Commissioner Mary Griffin. “I am pleased to learn that Scientific Certification System’s audit determined that DFW’s forest management practices are ecologically, socially, and economically sustainable, and that DFW has made substantial progress toward meeting its forest conservation and management goals.”

The annual audit of state forestry practices is part of a program to ensure the highest standards of forest management, including certification by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). The FSC is a nonprofit, independent, international organization formed in 1993 by a group of environmentalists, foresters, loggers, and sociologists to promote sustainable forestry. FSC

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS · EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY & ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

Department of Conservation and Recreation
251 Causeway Street, Suite 600
Boston MA 02114-2119
617-626-1250 617-626-1351 Fax
www.mass.gov/dcr



Deval L. Patrick
Governor

Timothy P. Murray
Lt. Governor

Ian A. Bowles, Secretary, Executive
Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs

Richard K. Sullivan, Jr., Commissioner
Department of Conservation & Recreation

standards are meant to ensure that forestry is practiced in an environmentally responsible, socially beneficial, and economically viable way. FSC was established to promote the responsible management of the world's forests, with international headquarters in Bonn, Germany.

FSC certification is awarded every five years to landowners who have shown they are meeting FSC standards. Certification is an acknowledgement that the forests are being well managed. DCR and DFW received certification in 2004, and have had surveillance audits each year since to determine whether the agencies are continuing to improve their forestry practices.

"In the context of FSC certification, some significant advances were achieved during the past year, as in the three previous years since the certificate was awarded," the auditors wrote in their report. Among the accomplishments cited were forest mapping, improved planning and public consultation, and the design and implementation of a scientifically based ecological reserve system.

"EOEEA is to be commended for the way that they have continued to take on the challenges of meeting the rigorous FSC standard," the auditors wrote.

"I am excited that, in recent years, DCR has added 100,000 acres of new forest reserves," said State Representative Frank Smizik, chairman of the joint committee on environment, natural resources, and agriculture. "I am also pleased to see that EOEEA is making a renewed effort to become a more effective steward of the Commonwealth's forest resources. Hopefully, this audit process, in addition to greater public outreach, will lead to top-level forest management, more acres of forest reserves, and improved wildlife habitat."

"The successful management of nature's resources that are under the ownership of the Commonwealth is a serious responsibility," said State Senator Stephen M. Brewer, a long-time forest advocate. "To protect and enhance this resource for current and future generations is also a trust given to the current stewards of these forest reserves. I am pleased that dedicated employees of the Commonwealth have maintained that trust."

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The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), an agency of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, oversees 450,000 acres of parks and forests, beaches, bike trails, watersheds, and dams, in addition to 278 bridges and miles of roadways. Led by Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan Jr., the agency's mission is to protect, promote, and enhance our common wealth of natural, cultural, and recreational resources. To

*learn more about DCR, our facilities, and our programs, please visit www.mass.gov/dcr.
Contact us at mass.parks@state.ma.us.*